



Fence Requirements - Residential

809 N. Broadway / Milwaukee, WI 53202-3617 / 414-286-8210

Fences offer privacy and enclosure that may be desirable in a residential setting. Fences also have a visual impact on properties and neighborhoods. To ensure that impact is positive, the City of Milwaukee regulates fences. These regulations establish standards for fence materials, construction, heights and placement on the property.

Fences may be built up to your property line (which is a shared invisible line between two adjoining properties). Fences may be set back any distance from the lot line.

You will need to determine where your property lines are located. If a survey is not included with your mortgage papers, call or visit our microfilm desk (414-286-8207) to see if we have a property survey on file. If not, you may wish to hire a surveyor (listed online or in the Yellow Pages) to determine & mark your lot lines. Placing a fence that goes over a lot line onto your neighbor's property is not allowed; additional expense may be incurred to remedy the situation. The City DPW Estimating Section can tell you where your front or side street lot line is located in relation to the curb or edge of pavement. You can email them at lotline@milwaukee.gov for front yard or side street lot line information **only**.

A fence may not be built on neighboring property. If you believe your neighbor's fence encroaches onto your property, you may initiate private legal action. **City government does not arbitrate these disputes.** If you have a concern about a neighborhood fence and would like an inspector to investigate whether the fence was built to code or has the proper permit, call the DNS Construction Inspection division at (414) 286-2513.

Code Requirements

Materials

Fences must be built with approved fence wire, standard fence wood, vinyl, or metal such as wrought iron. You may not build a fence with scrap lumber, chicken wire, wood pallets, or other unapproved materials. Fence posts and supports must be installed on the side of the fence that faces your own house or yard (good side toward your neighbor).

Historic districts

If you live in a local historic district, call the Historic Preservation office, (414) 286-5712, before you start building or enter into a contract with a fence company. A Certificate of Appropriateness is required before a fence permit can be issued.

Height and location

The height allowed for a fence depends on its location on your lot and on the fence style or material. Corner lots present unique challenges. Generally, the narrower street frontage of a corner lot is the front of the lot, no matter which street the house faces. The city also defines a side yard somewhat differently than what you might expect. A side yard is defined as that portion of the lot that is located on each side of your house. It is distinct from the front yard, the back yard, the side street or the rear street. Please refer to the diagram on the back of this page for clarification.

- The maximum allowable height for a fence in a front yard is 4 feet. However, if the fence is constructed with an ornamental material, such as wrought iron with or without masonry or wood piers, a 6' high fence is allowed provided the fence is at least 50% open. This is

also true for side street and rear street fences.

- The maximum height allowed for a solid fence in the side yard is 4 feet. A 6-foot fence is allowed if the upper 2 feet is at least 50% open construction, such as lattice or chain link. A side yard fence placed at least 10 feet inside the lot line can be a solid fence up to 6 feet high.
- The maximum allowable height for any fence in the rear yard is 6 feet.
- Opaque, solid or privacy fences built at the intersection of a street and a driveway, alley or another street are limited to a height of 3 feet. (See **Vision Setback Triangle** below.)

Code requirements for residential fences can be researched in the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances, section 295-505-4 (f).

Vision Setback Triangle

If you wish to build an opaque or solid fence where 2 streets, an alley and a street, or a driveway and a street intersect, the fence will be limited to a height of 3 feet within a specific vision setback area, to prevent traffic blind spots & hazards to pedestrians.

The vision setback is formed by connecting 2 points, a set distance from the intersection, to form a triangle. The two points are measured an equal distance away from the point of intersection, along the drive, walk or curb. The specific distance (10'-25') depends on your zoning district. Solid fences, coniferous trees & shrubs, hedges, signs, and other obstructions taller than 3' are prohibited within this triangle.

Beware of underground cables or pipe!

Contact Diggers Hotline, at least three business days before you dig, to mark the location of buried utilities on your property. Diggers Hotline can be reached at 811, 1-800-242-8511 or www.diggershotline.com.

Permit

You can obtain a fence permit application from the Development Center by calling (414) 286-8207 or by downloading a permit form at

our website, milwaukee.gov/permits. Click on "Homeowner Information Topics & Applications" for a permit form. The cost of a fence permit is a total of \$30.35 (\$25 fence permit, \$0.35 IT and Training Surcharge and \$5.00 processing fee). If you wish to apply for a permit in person, visit the Development Center at 809 N. Broadway, first floor. [Click here](#) and scroll down for current hours.

